Should Have Watched Oswald — FBI Agent

By Jeremiah O'Leary
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Lee Harvey Oswald should have been on the FBI's security index, a list of persons deemed potentially dangerous and requiring close watching, during the days preceding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, a former high-ranking bureau official has told the House Assassinations Committee.

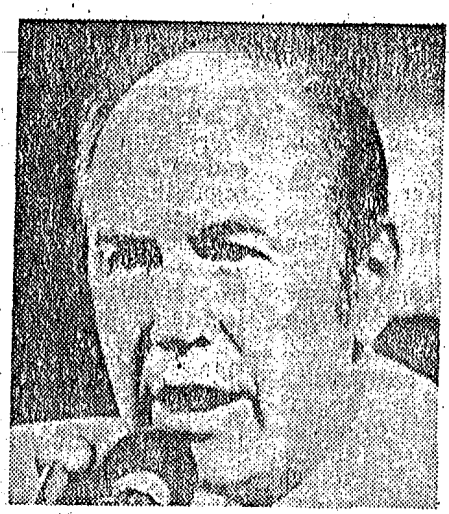
Under questioning by Chairman Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, however, the ex-official said it wouldn't have prevented the Dallas assassination if Oswald had been on the list.

James H. Gale, who was assistant director of the bureau's inspection division at the time, said yesterday the bureau committed internal errors in handling evidence along with investigative and reporting delinquencies regarding Oswald, Kennedy's accused assassin.

GALE SAID THE late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover assigned him to investigate the bureau's pre-assassination handling of the Oswald case the day after the president was killed.

Gale said he found enough errors and discrepancies for his conclusion that administrative action should be taken against the responsible personnel and disciplinary action was recommended against 17 agents and supervisors. The administrative action was carried out, even though some agents on the Oswald case feared word of it might get out and embarrass the commission.

"Oswald should have been on the Security Index; his wife, Marina, should have been interviewed and the case should have been expedited after Oswald visited the Soviet Embassy in Mexico," Gale testified.



JAMES H. GALE
Former FBI inspector

Gale said one of the excuses from Special Agent James P. Hosty in Dallas for not pressing ahead with the case was that Oswald had just beaten his wife and that a 60-day cooling off period should take place before calling on the Oswalds again. That was 10 days before the assassination.

"THE AGENT FELT Marina Oswald should not feel that she was being harassed," according to Gale. "Mr. Hoover said that was an asinine excuse. I thought she should have been interviewed right after her husband beat her because she would be more likely to tell us about him under those circumstances. Mr. Hoover said he did not understand such solicitude."

The Hosty visit to Marina in search of Lee led her to write down the agent's name, phone number and auto license number. Oswald was angered by the visit and dispatched a note to the Dallas FBI field office threatening to blow up the police station if his wife was not left alone. Controversy still rages about the destruction of the note after Oswald's death at the hands of Jack Ruby on Nov. 24. Hosty, still an FBI agent, insists he destroyed the note on the orders of Special Agent in Charge J. Gordon Shanklin while Shanklin, now retired, says he never heard of the note until recently.

Gale testified that he did not learn of the note and its destruction until four years after his 1971 retirement.

"I thought Oswald should have been put on the Security Index because of his contact with the Fair Play For Cuba Committee, because he said he was a Marxist, he subscribed to The Worker and had given a radio interview in which he said Russia had gone soft on communism and that Cuba was the only revolutionary country in the world," Gale testified. Hoover agreed with the inspection report but the agents working on the Oswald case did not.

GALE SAID HE LATER wrote a memo to Hoover's deputy, the late Clyde Tolson in which he recommended further actions "against those (agents) who publicly embarrassed the bureau." He said he felt that some material had been mishandled and that some testimony before the Warren Commission was too flamboyant. This came about when some FBI personnel informed the commission that Oswald's background indicated that a "stop" should have been put on his passport but the FBI's public position was that the evidence didn't warrant a passport "stop."

Gale said other personnel said Oswald shouldn't have been on the Security Index. "I thought he should be on it," Gale added.